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ABSTRACT

Past research has demonstrated a relationship between children's physical attractiveness and their self-esteem. Other research has found that learning disabled children are at risk for having low self-esteem. This study examined the relationship between self-esteem and facial attractiveness in learning disabled children. Subjects were 20 diagnosed learning disabled children between the ages of 9 and 12 from a special school. Subjects' self-esteem was measured by administering the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. Facial attractiveness was measured by nine female judges who were unaware of the hypothesis of the study. The judges rated photographs of the children on a Facial Attractiveness Scale and the mean of the ratings for each child was used as the attractiveness rating for that child. The results indicated that there was a positive relationship between higher self-esteem and higher ratings of facial attractiveness among these learning disabled children. The results imply the importance of attractiveness in the development of self-esteem among learning disabled children. (NB)

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Self-Esteem and Facial Attractiveness Among Learning Disabled Children

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Abstract

The relationship between self-esteem and facial attractiveness in learning disabled children was investigated. Subjects were 20 diagnosed learning disabled children between the ages of 9 and 12 from a special school in the southeast. Subjects' self-esteem was measured by administering the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. Facial attractiveness was measured by nine female judges who were unaware of the hypothesis of the study. The judges rated photographs of the children on a Facial Attractiveness Scale and the mean of the ratings for each child was used as the attractiveness rating for that child. The results indicate that there is a positive relationship between higher self-esteem and higher ratings of facial attractiveness among learning disabled children ($p < .025$). The results imply the importance of attractiveness in the development of self-esteem among learning disabled children. Implications are discussed.

Self-Esteem and Facial Attractiveness Among Learning Disabled Children

Self-esteem has been examined extensively by a number of researchers. Coopersmith (1987, p.2) defines self-esteem as "a personal judgment of worthiness expressed in the attitudes a person holds towards the self." Self-esteem has been found to develop sometime in early childhood and remains relatively constant throughout life (Searcy, 1988). High self-esteem is seen as a necessary precursor to healthy identity development. Many factors have been found to affect the development of an individual's self-esteem.

Zahr (1985) has found evidence that children's physical attractiveness affects their self-esteem. Research has revealed that people attribute personality characteristics to others on the basis of their physical attractiveness, attributing more socially desirable characteristics to attractive individuals (Aronson, 1988; Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Knealy, Frude, & Shaw, 1988; Vander Zanden, 1987). Even infants are assessed by appearance, with the attractive infant expected to exhibit more positive traits than less attractive infants (Stephan & Langlois, 1984). These attributions inevitably lead to

different expectations and treatment of individuals with differing levels of attractiveness (Aronson, 1988). Although such reactions to attractiveness may be extremely subtle, it is unlikely that the child can escape its influence, and his or her self-esteem will undoubtably be affected (Aronson, 1988).

Recently, interest has grown in the development of self-esteem among learning disabled children, and it has been found that they are at risk for having low self-esteem (Searcy, 1988). This could occur because learning disabled children are often judged in more negative and rejecting terms by parents, teachers, and classmates than are "normal" children (Rourke, 1988).

The present study examines the relationship between self-esteem and physical attractiveness among learning disabled children. For the purposes of this study physical attractiveness will be limited to facial attractiveness. The experimenters hypothesize that higher self-esteem will be positively correlated with higher ratings of attractiveness among learning disabled children.

Method

Subjects

Twenty diagnosed learning disabled children from a small private school for learning disabled children in the southeast served as subjects. One subject failed to follow the instructions,and her data were dropped from the study. Of the remaining nineteen students, fourteen were White males, four were White females, and one was a Black female. Their ages ranged from nine to twelve years of age (M = 10.74). Subjects were given a treat for their participation.

Materials

Coopersmith Inventory (1987). The Coopersmith Inventory school short form was used to measure the subjects' self-esteem. The reliability of the inventory was sufficiently high. Internal consistency coefficients ranged from .42 to .62. Validity ratings were adequate as well. Validity coefficients were computed for construct, concurrent, and predictive validity and ranged from .30 to .53.

Facial Attractiveness Scale. Subjects were rated on facial attractiveness according to a Likert-type scale ranging from 1, highly unattractive, to 9, highly attractive (See Appendix A).

Procedure

Subjects were randomly divided into four groups of five subjects and assigned to one of four female experimenters. Each group of subjects was taken into a private room where an experimenter administered the Coopersmith Inventory to the subjects. Subjects were read standardized instructions (See Appendix B) which were modified as needed to facilitate the subjects' understanding. Subjects' were then given two practice items and asked to respond verbally to assess understanding. Once the subjects understood the inventory the experimenters administered the test. The test was administered verbally to equate reading ability differences among the subjects. Each item was read twice. Subjects responded on individual answer sheets (See Appendix C). Subject's questions were answered as they arose during the testing. Standardized prompts were given (i.e. "You are doing a good job") after specific questions for encouragement.

Upon completion of the Coopersmith Inventory (school short form) subjects were thanked for their participation and asked if they would mind if the experimenters took a photograph of them "to remember who helped in the projects." Subjects were assured

that their names would not be connected with their photographs or their inventory responses. Each of the subjects agreed to have his or her photograph taken. Photographs were taken individually and subjects were asked not to smile (for standardization purposes).

The photographs were taken with a 35mm camera using color film. The photographs were rated on the Facial Attractiveness Scale (See Appendix A) by nine female judges who were unaware of the hypothesis of the study. Five of the judges were Black, and four were White. Mean scores of judges ratings were used as attractiveness ratings for the subjects.

Results

Means and standard deviations were computed for self-esteem scores and attractiveness ratings. The mean self-esteem score was 16.32 (SD = 4.69), and the mean attractiveness rating was 5.17 (SD = 1.38). A Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated and revealed a positive correlation between self-esteem and attractiveness as predicted, $r(17) = .49$, $p < .025$. Further analysis reveals no apparent difference between self-esteem scores of males (M = 15.93, SD = 5.09) and females (M = 17.40, SD = 3.58), and no apparent

difference between attractiveness ratings of males (M = 5.29, SD = 1.53) and females (M = 4.82, SD = .83).

Discussion

Congruent with previous literature, our study supports the hypothesis that higher self-esteem is correlated with higher ratings of facial attractiveness (Aronson, 1988; Zahr, 1985). This study, however, expanded the relationship to learning disabled children and found that the relationship exists in that population as well. The lack of difference between sexes could be because there is no difference between males and females or because there were so few female subjects.

These results, along with previous studies (Aronson, 1988; Dion et al, 1972; Knealy et al, 1988; Vander Zanden, 1987), indicate the overwhelming importance of physical attractiveness in our society. Such emphasis on physical attractiveness affects overall impressions of a person and thus what one expects from another. This differential behavior towards individuals of differing attractiveness levels is likely to be what affects their self-esteem (Aronson, 1988; Vander Zanden, 1987).

While this study supported our hypothesis and is congruent with the literature, several improvements should be made for future research to avoid confounds. A more random sample of learning disabled children is desirable for generalizability. The subjects who participated in this study came from one school and may not be representative of the learning disabled population. Another possible confound is that several children were smiling in their photographs, which may have affected their attractiveness ratings. Future experimenters should aim for more standardized expressions and should perhaps take more than one photograph of each child and choose the one most standardized as a caution.

Future research is desirable to determine why physical attractiveness is so influential on self-esteem. Studies need to be done on other minority groups (Blacks, Hispanics, women) to see if the relationship is constant among the various groups. It would be interesting to see if physical attractiveness is even more influential on minority groups than on the majority group.

The finding that physical attractiveness is so important and influential in our society is

unfortunate, but it is very well supported by the literature. Hopefully this kind of research will open society's eyes to this attribution error based on attractiveness, and differential treatment based on appearance will cease, leaving self-esteem to develop without influence from attractiveness.

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Appendix A

First, let me thank you for taking the time to do this. This questionnaire is to assess the facial attractiveness of each child. We would like you to rate their attractiveness. The scale ranges from 1 to 9. One (1) is highly unattractive, five (5) is "neutral," and nine (9) is highly attractive. These ratings will be completely confidential. They will not be connected in any way with the children. Please do not compare the children's photographs because this assessment is not based on ranking.

Again, thank you for your time.

Highly unattractive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Highly attractive

1.	11.
2.	12.
3.	13.
4.	14.
5.	15.
6.	16.
7.	17.
8.	18.
9.	19.
10.	20.

Appendix B

Instructions

I am doing a project for school and I need your help. This is not a test and will not be graded, I just want to know how your feel about certain things. There are no right or wrong answers.

Now I am going to read the instructions to you: I am going to read you some sentences about different feelings. If a statement describes how you usually feel, circle "like me," if the statement does not describe how you usually fee, circle "not like me." For instance, if I said "I attend the Bedford School" would you respond "like me" or "not like me"? Here's another example, "I have been to the moon." Is that like you or not like you? Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

After question #5, respond "GOOD"
After question #10, respond "YOU ARE DOING A GOOD JOB"
After question #14, respond "GOOD"
After question #20, respond "YOU ARE DOING A GOOD JOB"
After question #25, respond "YOU ARE DOING A GOOD JOB, WE ARE ALMOST THROUGH"

End: Thank you for helping me out with this project. but before you leave could I get a quick picture of you? And then we have a little treat for each of you when we are finished.

1.	Like Me	Not Like Me
2.	Like Me	Not Like Me
3.	Like Me	Not Like Me
4.	Like Me	Not Like Me
5.	Like Me	Not Like Me
6.	Like Me	Not Like Me
7.	Like Me	Not Like Me
8.	Like Me	Not Like Me
9.	Like Me	Not Like Me
10.	Like Me	Not Like Me
11.	Like Me	Not Like Me
12.	Like Me	Not Like Me
13.	Like Me	Not Like Me
14.	Like Me	Not Like Me
15.	Like Me	Not Like Me
16.	Like Me	Not Like Me
17.	Like Me	Not Like Me
18.	Like Me	Not Like Me
19.	Like Me	Not Like Me
20.	Like Me	Not Like Me
21.	Like Me	Not Like Me
22.	Like Me	Not Like Me
23.	Like Me	Not Like Me
24.	Like Me	Not Like Me
25.	Like Me	Not Like Me
26.	Like Me	Not Like Me
27.	Like Me	Not Like Me
28.	Like Me	Not Like Me
29.	Like Me	Not Like Me